

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, May 11, 1908, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Hammondsport, New York. May 11th, 1908. Mrs. A. G. Bell, 1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C. My sweet darling little wifie:

We have had nothing but rain (or snow) since I came here until yesterday when the sun came out and began to dry up the sodden fields for the experiment we have so long been waiting for.

Our aerodrome No. 2 has been finished for some time and has been housed in a large tent which has been erected at the private race track about 2 miles from here where the trial will be made.

Our aerodrome No. 1 "Selfridge's Redwing" was flown by Baldwin during Selfridge's absence in New York; so our aerodrome No. 2 "Baldwin's Whitewing" will be flown by Selfridge.

Everyone was out early this morning at the scene of operations — weather ideal excepting that the wind blew too strongly to render an experiment advisable. All day long we have kept close to the tent — without dinner or supper — waiting for that blessed wind to go down. At last about 7 P. M. it seemed calm enough and yet light enough to allow the trial. The Whitewing was brought out on to the race track — and her engine was tried. Round went the 6 foot propeller at such a rate that quite a number of men struggled with the machine to prevent her from moving. In laboratory tests a few days ago the propeller, making 1000 rotations per minute gave a pull of 2 250 pounds. Today it was rotating, we think, still more rapidly and probably gave a greater pull (or rather push).

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Just light enough remained for a trial — but alas, just when we hoped our patience would be rewarded, there came a sprinkling of large rain drops and the machine was carried into the shelter of the tent just in time to escape serious wetting, and the spectators took the soaking instead. The weather reports published in today's papers (Monday) speak of rain for Tuesday and Wednesday so I am afraid we may have to wait again for a suitable occasion. Everyone will be or rather hopes to be awake at daybreak tomorrow in case the weather should prove suitable — for the local weather prophets here say that the best chance for a calm is in the early morning or late evening.

I am very anxious to witness this trial for, as you know, I missed the other trials with the Redwing. Mr. Lyon has just arrived from Rochester. He is interested in our experiments and came on on chance. He is very much pleased to know that he is in time.

Casey has just heard from Miss Parminter, fixing the wedding day for June 12th, so as to permit of our presence upon the occasion.

Mr. Augustus Post, Secretary of the Aero Club of America, has been here for many days, waiting for results. Other specialists here anxious to witness the trial are, Mr. Jones, the inventor of a new form of dirigible balloon 3 which he is making here, Mr. Williams, the inventor of a Helicopter (a whirling machine of the heavier-than-air type) and Mr. Myers, the inventor of an Orthopter (or Oraithoper) a machine skin to the beating-wing type — but which does not operate by beating-wings. His wing-pieces have numerous valves which open on the upstroke and close on the downstroke. “The boys” call it the “Wind-grabber.”

All Hammondsport seems to be alive to the occasion and numerous visitors have appeared at the race track. Newspaper reporters too have been on hand all day enjoying the sunshine and cool breezes, and not venturing to visit town, even to eat, for fear the wind would go down during their absence, and they might be absent at the critical time.

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A large delegation of school children from Hammondsport appeared in the afternoon, and were much pleased to be in time to see the flying-machine — even though they could not see it fly. Some truants from school have been hovering round the tent all day from an early hour in the morning. Fine bright-looking boys and I only hope that their teachers will be merciful to them when their hour of reckoning arrives.

I do hope that conditions may be favorable tomorrow although the weather predictions are not reassuring. I will telegraph you the moment I have any news.

I want to hear particulars of Alexander's christening and hope for a letter tomorrow. I am very lonely here without 4 you and would come right home did I not have the feeling that it is my duty to see this thing out. I have been having quite a bad cold, with headache and stiff joints during nearly the whole of the wet spell, but sunshine and "holy water" have cleared me of pain and moodiness — and I am now as well as ever again. Poor Mr. Curties, however, has not been so fortunate. His cold has developed into an attack of "Mumps" and he is now confined to his room. Selfridge, Baldwin and Douglas are here every evening and help to cheer me up — our evening parties are now enlarged by Mr. Post and Mr. Lych. Mr. Post has a fine voice and is a cultivated singer and has brought some fine music with him. I have been playing his accompaniments for him.

Your loving, Alec.